

Opening Statement of the Honorable Joseph R. Pitts
Subcommittee on Health
Hearing on “Examining the FY 2016 HHS Budget”
February 26, 2015

(As Prepared for Delivery)

I would like to thank Secretary Burwell for appearing before the Subcommittee to discuss the Administration's FY2016 budget request for the Department of Health and Human Services.

Earlier this year, Madam Secretary, you stated that “the hallmark of effective leadership is instilling a culture of transparency, ownership, and accountability.”

These are all laudable goals and I appreciate your verbal commitment to these principles. However, your Department's actions have failed to adhere to the same standard.

For example, we have only heard silence from the White House on how the Administration is preparing for an adverse ruling in *King v. Burwell*.

We did receive a reply from you, and I thank you for that courtesy. But your letter contained no substantive answers to our questions.

During your testimony to the Senate Finance Committee, you were again asked about the Administration's plans. Again, you repeatedly declined to provide a direct answer.

This is not the transparency you promised. Understandably, we are very frustrated with Administration witnesses artfully dodging the questions we ask here. So I'm asking you: please let your guard down a little today, and give us direct and complete answers to our questions.

In 2009, the President correctly said, “The real problem with our long-term deficit actually has to do with our entitlements obligations.”

Since then we have had the Simpson-Bowles Commission, a Supercommittee, Sequestration, and a government shut down. Never once in all this time did the Administration propose a plan to get the nation's fiscal house in order by recommending reforms to entitlements.

The 2014 Medicare Trustees Report, which you signed, tells us that Medicare will be bankrupt very soon. We recently had Senator Joe Lieberman and former OMB Director Alice Rivlin here. They told us much the same. We stand ready to do the hard work of saving Medicare, but we need a willing partner.

Once again, the President's budget fails to propose serious entitlement reform. The proposals in the budget related to Medicaid amount to saving just 15 days' worth of program spending over the next ten years.

The plan, apparently, is to let Medicare expenditures continue to grow without any of the structural reforms needed to strengthen and save this critical program.

This is not taking ownership.

If we are going to save and strengthen our safety net programs for the most vulnerable, we have to do better than the President's budget. Both parties have to work together. You, we, and the President need work together to save our entitlement programs and make them sustainable. Please work with us.

On another subject, you may also remember that, in early November of last year, we spoke on the phone about why HHS has so far failed to hold California accountable under federal law.

As you know, on August 22, 2014, the California Department for Managed Health Care (DMHC) issued a directive mandating that all plans under DMHC authority immediately include coverage for all legal abortions.

This is in direct violation of the Weldon Amendment, a civil rights statute that prohibits federal taxpayer funding for Federal agencies and state or local governments that discriminate because a health care entity does not provide, pay for, provide coverage of, or refer for abortions.

What California is doing is clearly illegal. It is also morally wrong, and violates the fundamental principles of freedom and conscience that our democracy is founded on. It is your job to stop them, and so far it hasn't happened. I'll have more to say about this when we get to questions.

In the mean time, Madam Secretary, we look forward to your testimony. We hope that you will stay to answer all of our questions, and, with only five minutes of questions per Member, we respectfully ask that you keep your answers concise and to the point.

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